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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MUSCAT 000234

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDIN PARA MARKING)

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TAGS: PREL IR LE MU
SUBJECT: OMANI FOREIGN MINISTER PROVIDES READOUT FROM MARCH MEETINGS IN TEHRAN

REF: MUSCAT 00185

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Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Oman's Foreign Minister told the Ambassador on March 10 that Iranian officials during his most recent trip to Tehran were eager to restart negotiations to resolve concerns over Iran's nuclear program. They asserted, however, that suspension of uranium enrichment activities could only be a result of such negotiations, rather than a precondition for talks. Iranian leaders remained fearful that the U.S. ultimately sought "regime change" in Tehran, and would not agree to freeze Iran's enrichment program in exchange for dropping UN sanctions against Iran. The Iranians claimed that they were supportive of efforts by Saudi King Abdullah and the Arab League to broker a compromise between the government and oppositionists in Lebanon. End Summary.

"TECHNICAL PROBLEM" IMPEDED NEGOTIATIONS WITH IRAN

¶2. (C) Recently returned from Tehran for a meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yousef bin Alawi gave a readout on March 10 to the Ambassador on his discussions during the event with Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Chairman of Iran's Expediency Council, and Ali Larijani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme Council for National Security.

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Bin Alawi stated that the overall purpose of his latest trip to Tehran was to "get a sense" from both Rafsanjani and Larijani on latest developments in the Iranian nuclear file as he had been unable to meet with either man during his last visit to Iran to meet with President Ahmadinejad (reftel).

¶3. (S) According to bin Alawi, both Rafsanjani and Larijani were very eager to "find a way to start negotiations," and had stressed to him that they were ready to "do their part" to achieve a peaceful resolution through dialogue. The two officials had commented positively on recent statements by the Secretary, and told bin Alawi that EU High Representative for the Common and Foreign Security Policy Javier Solana was currently attempting to help restart talks between Iran and the West. Larijani also believed and was pleased that the U.S. and Switzerland were "cooperating" on messages sent to Tehran from Bern. However, bin Alawi continued, there is a major "technical problem" concerning the proposed terms of renewed negotiations, as well as a question over whether talks should be under a joint P5 plus 1 framework, or whether Solana should take the lead. Iran strongly preferred a P5 plus 1 approach so as to include the U.S. The Iranians, bin Alawi related, did not rule out freezing their enrichment activities, but were adamant that they would not agree to an enrichment suspension prior to talks as such a freeze must be a result of the negotiations, rather than a precondition.

"SUSPENSION FOR SUSPENSION" A ON-STARTER IN TEHRAN

¶4. (C) Bin Alawi said that his Iranian hosts had ruled out a "suspension (of enrichment) for suspension (of sanctions)" formula for talks as they claimed that the lifting of sanctions would have "little effect" on Iran, while suspension of enrichment would "affect thousands on the ground" working on Iran's nuclear program and in its research facilities and thus cause financial hardship. (Note: Bin Alawi remarked that he did not attempt to go into the basis for such a claim as it would have been "a waste of time." End Note.) What the Iranians said they wanted from negotiations, stated bin Alawi, was an agreed method to confirm for the international community that their nuclear

program was not military in nature. To help achieve this, the Iranians claimed that they were amenable to giving the IAEA more responsibility and access for inspections. If the U.S. and the West, on the other hand, continued to involve the UN Security Council and seek ever more stringent sanctions, the Iranians asserted that they saw "no point" in trying to negotiate. Part of the reason for this attitude, bin Alawi said, was deep concern that the ultimate U.S. goal regarding Iran was regime change. Both Rafsanjani and Larijani said that sanctions that directly impacted Iran's "sovereignty" could be construed as "an act of war" and would never be accepted by the Iranian public. Bin Alawi opined that Iran was likely to wait until the UN Security Council concluded debate on a new sanctions resolution before it "formalized" its position.

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¶5. (C) The Ambassador told bin Alawi that any agreement to verify the allegedly peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program was implicit in any deal that might be reached with Iran. However, more was required of the Iranians - specifically suspension of nuclear enrichment activities and full cooperation with the IAEA on its requests for information and inspections - given their past deceitful behavior and the justifiable lack of trust in the West regarding Tehran's intentions. Reminded by the Ambassador of the incentives offered by the P5 plus 1 proposal given to Tehran in 2006, bin Alawi responded that the Iranians did not appear to be "looking seriously" at the package as they thought it did not offer enough benefits. He added that the Iranians also suspected that the U.S. would try and make its suspension of uranium enrichment permanent.

IRAN AFRAID U.S. OUT TO "UNDO" REVOLUTION

¶6. (C) Asked by the Ambassador if he had noticed any difference in Rafsanjani's or Larijani's views on the nuclear question, bin Alawi replied that he had not. He recalled that Larijani previously told him that a Western policy seeking sanctions against Iran would "only make the people of Iran take hostile positions" and strengthen public support for Iranian President Ahmadinejad and the Revolutionary Guard. Bin Alawi agreed that Rafsanjani's status within Iran was likely rising and observed that the Chairman seemed very concerned about the possibility of a conflict with the U.S.

¶7. (C) While emphasizing that Oman definitely did not seek to play the role of mediator in the current "impasse" between Iran and the West, bin Alawi stated that Oman wished to be helpful by "clarifying positions" and supporting the efforts of Javier Solana and IAEA Director General Mohammed al-Baradei. He claimed that he often emphasized to Iranian officials that the West had very legitimate concerns about its nuclear activities, and that there was no easy way to restrict the use of nuclear technology for non-military purposes. Bin Alawi asked the Ambassador if Washington would try to develop "new ideas" to take advantage of Iran's desire to resolve the nuclear issue. He said that he shared the Ambassador's hope that a strong, unified stance by the international community would succeed in prodding Tehran to change its behavior and positions on talks. He further advised that any new UN Security Council resolution should not/not make any mention of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as this would be seen as an affront to Iran's sovereignty and help solidify hardliner opinions in Iran that the U.S. was ultimately out to "undo" the revolution.

IRAQIS URGING TEHRAN TO TALK WITH U.S.

¶8. (C) Turning to Iraq, bin Alawi reported that the Iranians claimed that they had received appeals from "many Iraqi leaders" for Iran to negotiate with the U.S. on both the nuclear issue and how to end sectarian strife in Iraq. The Iranians didn't take these entreaties too seriously, however, as the Iraqis simply and summarily advised Tehran to "talk to (U.S. Ambassador to Iraq) Khalilzad" when asked how to go about this. Rafsanjani and Larijani had confirmed to bin Alawi that Iran would participate in the sub-ministerial Iraqi Neighbors prepcon in Baghdad on March 10. (Note: Bin Alawi claimed that Riyadh had declined to either host a ministerial-level Iraqi Neighbors' Conference or send a minister to Baghdad as this could have been seen by the Saudi public as strong royal support for Iraqi PM Maliki. Turkey, he stated, then proposed a deputy-level prepcon meeting in Baghdad to include the P5 and others to make the event more palatable to the Saudis and critics of the Iraqi government in the Gulf. End Note.)

IRAN SUPPORTS LEBANESE COMPROMISE?

¶9. (C) Bin Alawi said that he did not ask the Iranians (or the Saudis) about the recent visit of Ahmadinejad to Riyadh. Neither had he inquired about Iran's current relations with

Syria. Bin Alawi speculated that Ahmadi-Nejad traveled to Saudi Arabia to "be seen as more moderate" and to assure Saudi King Abdullah that Iran would not be an obstacle in his efforts to help broker a deal between the government and oppositionists in Lebanon and form a national unity government within the Palestinian territories. Rafsanjani personally told him that Tehran supported King Abdullah's

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efforts on these fronts, as well as Arab League attempts to achieve a compromise between the different factions in Lebanon. Bin Alawi continued that in his opinion, all parties in Lebanon - including "key players" Hassan Nasrallah of Hezbollah and Saad Hariri - had finally realized that the current situation was "hurting everyone" and could not be allowed to continue indefinitely. Persuading Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and Michel Aoun to agree to a compromise solution, bin Alawi mused, would be particularly difficult.

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